



OM meets...

SALLY PARKES

Yoga teacher trainer, author, and Pilates coach, Sally Parkes, talks to OM about how yoga has shaped her life and continues to do so

How did you first get into yoga?

I had a strong background in sports and exercise science, but my usual training just wasn't enough for me anymore as I wanted to delve deeper and move past the physical body. I also had a lot of knee and shoulder issues from long-distance running and power lifting, which I wanted to heal holistically so that I could avoid surgery. I started going to classes with a lovely teacher at my local leisure centre called Faye. She was in her sixties at the time and wore tights and a leotard and used to do headstand before the class to get focused. I found her super cool and very intriguing. I remember after my first class with her, which was very gentle, that I had wobbly legs. I hadn't done anything particularly strenuous, so I knew that it must be energy releasing and moving, which I found fascinating. I then found a Buddhist centre in Brighton where they offered Ashtanga and Iyengar and I really liked the different energies of these classes. My injuries also cleared up after 18 months of consistent yoga practice too.

What does yoga give you personally?

Aside from the physical benefits, yoga encourages me to slow down and self-reflect often. The slowing down is important to me as I have dyslexia and ADHD, so if I start to rush or try to do too much then I often make mistakes and bad choices. I also love how yoga helps us to be present. I have had many chapters in my life where I have been so busy looking to the future that I have missed out on enjoying what I was doing at the time. I don't want to exist like that anymore and yoga is a tool to help me achieve a way of existence that is more enjoyable.

Any favourite teachers or studios?

When I lived in London a few years back I loved The Yoga Haven and Tri Yoga as the variety of classes were vast and I was really into hot yoga at the time. I also studied weekly with Caroline Shola Arewa who taught me a lot about how we can manage our own energetics. Since lockdown though my practice, like most other yogis, has moved online. I am a teacher for movementformodernlife.com so I tend to use their site as they have some highly-experienced teachers such as Norman Blair, Kristi Rodelli, Aofie Kane and Lizzie Reumont to name a few. I also go to classes at my local gym. I'm aware that the yoga world can be quite critical

of 'gym yoga' but I find the teachers often have a very good background in anatomy because of other movement disciplines, they have learnt and are very adept in being inclusive of everyone, which can be helpful for beginners and those with physical injuries and conditions.

How would you describe your own teaching style?

I try to strike a balance between being respectful of the yoga tradition whilst making my classes relaxed and uplifting. I am aware that the yoga tradition is not technically in my heritage, and as such am an imposter to a certain degree, so I try to work diligently to be as respectful as I can be towards yoga, not only when teaching but also in the way that I run my business. There are always challenges with both but I have learned that checking in with the eight limbs of yoga to make sure you are still on the right path on a regular basis is helpful, as it helps to keep the ego in check too.

Three words to describe your classes?

It is always tricky to know how your teachings are landing with students, but my hope is that my classes are inclusive, informative and light-hearted; the latter I find important because if students feel relaxed and supported in class, then their mind and body are more receptive to yoga asana and pranayama.

Yoga career highs so far?

I feel I got really lucky with the teachers I studied with, all of whom have their teaching rooted in traditional yoga, which I love. Ann-See Yeoh, Paul Dallaghan, Russel Case, Sarah Miles, Allie Hill and Uma Dinsmore-Tuli have all been great guides for me and their way of teaching still influences me now. I've also studied Ashtanga Yoga in Mysore with the Jois family and pranayama with Sh. O.P. Tiwari which were experiences that I will hold dear forever. I have been fortunate in that since launching my pregnancy yoga teacher training 10 years ago, I have



been invited to teach all over the UK as well as several times in the Middle East and Vietnam. This has been an amazing learning tool for me as I used to have little idea of how differently pregnancy, birth and postpartum are viewed in various parts of the world, and now I get to enjoy sharing this knowledge with my students. The greatest highlight though will always be the people I get to meet when I am teaching. From international students to my neighbour popping in for a yoga session, there is something to learn from everyone and if a teacher stays open to receiving lessons, the student can teach the teacher too.

What are your plans going forward?

Earlier this year I launched the Sally Parkes Yoga Club which is an online and on-demand platform focused on women's wellbeing. People can enjoy a free trial and then it is only £5 a month as my aim is to share informative and empowering content for low-income yoga students and teachers, so I am looking forward to growing that organically over time. I am also focused on writing new content for my yoga teacher training school which I established in 2011. I feel it's important to keep updating material to avoid complacency. For example, I am currently reading through various research papers that I feel help to back the science of yoga and so I can bring these into my trainings. I am also keen to build more of a community feel for my 1,500 or so graduates as I know how often guidance and encouragement to keep going as a yoga student and teacher is needed.

Any advice for new yoga teachers just starting out?

Yes: don't rush to drop your day job. The yoga industry can be tricky to navigate at

times and it can take a while to carve out a niche for yourself. I had two part-time jobs that fitted around my teaching for several years before having enough teaching work to go full-time. Also, learning another discipline such as Pilates can really help to keep things interesting, minimise overuse injuries and boost teaching hours as well.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you started out as a teacher?

I wish I had known that yoga teacher burnout is a real thing. When I started, everything was in-person and I had no idea how long the days would be and how hard it would be on my body. Teachers now have more options to create a more passive income though, which is a positive progression in career sustainability. Boundaries on your time and student and teacher relations are important too, so professional lines don't become blurred. Yoga teachers need rest but if we allow ourselves to be easily accessible all the time, it can play havoc with our wellbeing.

Any tips for students new to yoga?

I find that people often go into yoga thinking it will be easy and relaxing, but often to begin with it is quite the opposite and can be a big wake-up call to the body and nervous system. Therefore, my advice is to take your time, allow for a decent recovery inbetween yoga sessions for physical repair, the processing of emotions and the settling of the nervous system. But most of all, don't be too hard on yourself because it truly is a never-ending journey.

What do you say to people who feel they can't do yoga for whatever reason?

I saw an answer to this question somewhere years ago and it was something like, 'But you are never too dirty to take a bath!' So with that in mind I would say that it's never too late to start yoga, and the wonderful thing about it is that there is an entry point for everyone. I think the key is so start off slowly with short practices that can become a habit. Then, before you know it, yoga has become a way of life and you'll miss it if you don't practice.

What do you do when you're not doing yoga?

I am a full-time mum to my two daughters, so that is pretty time consuming, as is the day-to-day

Quick Q&A

Favourite yoga or spiritual book?

Yoni Shakti by Uma Dinsmore-Tuli. I was very fortunate to be gifted a copy by the author and have been in love with it ever since.

Go-to health food or drink?

My daily green smoothie of spinach, pear, banana, oats, dried fruits, chai and flax seeds and plant milk is the ultimate go-to for me.

Holistic remedy you swear by?

I regularly order bespoke tincture from @naturapathherbalist when I feel low mentally or run down physically. Rachel is very devoted to her work and it shows in her products and client relations.

Favourite quote?

"Whether you think you can or you think you can't, either way, you are right" — Henry Ford

If you could take a class with anyone (now or in the distant past) who would it be with?

I currently feel very drawn to studying with Ana Forrest. She just seems really kickass and the real deal with an interesting back story, which is right up my street!

running of the household. I am not great at taking time off as I get restless easily, so that is something I am working on, but when I do, I just like hanging out with my kids and partner, seeing old friends and heading off into nature. Time in nature is important for everyone but especially those with ADHD as it helps to calm down racing thoughts by slowing down brain waves.

Any tips for incorporating yoga into ordinary activities?

In lockdown, I found that this is the best way to incorporate yoga, whether it's taking a forward bend whilst picking up toys off the floor, or doing some breath work while making dinner, it all adds up. This is why I regularly post 60-90 second videos of movement on social media, because it's just easy to fit into people's days, and consistency is key to our wellbeing. ॐ

For further information about Sally Parkes and details on classes, retreats and trainings please visit: sallyparkesyoga.com or connect on social media @sallyparkesyogaschool





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